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ABSTRACT

The Professional Semester program in the College of Education at Northeast Louisiana University originated in 1975 when a need was recognized to integrate practical applications of what was being taught in the required methods courses of the elementary education program. Program accreditation was received in Fall, 1998. This study was conducted to ascertain the effects of accreditation on preservice teachers' attitudes toward the competencies gained during elementary methods courses. It was hypothesized there would be no significant differences between pre- and post-accreditation groups in their attitudes. A Likert-like survey was administered to professional block students (N=825) at the end of each spring and fall semester for the years 1985-93, after students had received their grades for each course. The questionnaire was divided into four criterion measures: subject matter, audio-visual, classroom management and routines, and communications. Results indicated that post-accreditation preservice teachers felt the methods courses did not prepare them as well when compared to the attitudes of the pre-accreditation group. Results are detailed in three tables. Consideration of implications for teacher education programs complete the document. (Contains 10 references.) (LL)

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The Effects of Accreditation on Preservice Teachers' Attitudes Toward Elementary Methods Courses

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Rationale:

Roth (1989) cited a report from the Council of Chief State School Officers that recommended teacher preparation programs should be balanced and those in elementary education become less generalized in the area. Such programs need to be redesigned, thus strengthening teacher education and giving more credibility to the profession. Goodlad (1991) researched conditions necessary for renewing teacher education programs and reported four findings:

(1) Lack of prestige in teacher education

(2) Lack of program coherence

(3) Separation of theory and practice

(4) Regulated conformity

Goodlad further stated that preservice teachers should be presented an outlined mission for completing teacher preparation courses. By providing sequence and organization, candidates in teacher preparation are exposed to a more coherent program where major theoretical themes are introduced and continued in an uninterrupted succession. Soder (1990) reported the perceived missions of professors from both public and private institutions. Results from all surveyed institutions indicated teaching as a first desired priority and preparing teachers as a second desired priority.

An article by Edward Meade (1991) stated that clinical training for teachers take place in a school setting in order to offer more insight to the "real" classroom; and this clinical training should be representative of the demographically selected clientele. Meade also advocated that clinical

training for teachers occur over a substantial amount of time- preferably a school year.

According to the NCATE book on accreditation (1990), field-based experiences can be defined as "those that are conducted at a school site, a school administration center, a school clinic, community agency." Posner (1989) stated that all teaching situations have four common features: (1) teacher, (2) learner, (3) subject matter, and (4) context. The first three components (teacher, learner, subject matter) are all grounded within the context for providing a social and physical component. In order to insure comprehensive field experiences to the student teacher, preservice teachers should be exposed to the classroom setting during clinical experiences and prior to the student teaching component. Hosford (1984) cited Madeline Hunter as advocating a preservice program that is theory based and is modeled by professors and supervising teachers in the field. Future teachers should be provided the opportunity to apply theory in guided practices with both mini-lessons and direct classroom placement.

Fischetti, Maloy, and Heffley (88-89) described how undergraduates were involved in tutoring in the secondary schools in the community. Even though only 20% of the research participants were education majors, comments from the study revealed that tutoring presented a practical perspective for whether or not to enter the teaching profession. If on -site experiences could act as a catalyst for teacher education majors, perhaps scheduled classroom involvement is deemed necessary in all teacher education programs.

The concept of the Professional Semester in the College of Education at Northeast Louisiana University originated in 1975 when the need was recognized for more practical application of what was being taught in the required methods courses of the elementary education degree program. At that time, five instructors taught five separate three-hour courses: methods in language arts, math, science, social studies, and children's literature. An examination of course outlines of these courses and subsequent discussions with involved faculty revealed much duplication of generic-type activities, such as lesson planning, unit planning, and writing instructional objectives. In addition, it was recognized by the instructors in elementary education that the students needed an opportunity to apply the theory and teaching techniques in "real" classrooms.

Throughout the spring semester, 1976, the instructors involved identified areas of commonalty in the methods classes, arranged a twenty-hour weekly block of time which included a three-hour generic session, and arranged a four-hour practicum to be done during the last four weeks of the professional semester. Plans were made for instructors to team teach the generic sessions, utilizing their particular strengths, continue to teach their specific methods content, and to actually go to the schools during the practicum phase to closely monitor the students in planning and teaching.

The Professional Semester plan was first implemented during the Fall Semester, 1976. Over a 17 year period, the program has grown from an enrollment of approximately twenty-five students in a single section class to as many as seventy-five students in three sections of each class. The methods course in Children's Literature has since been moved to

accompany the reading block. A course in tests and measurements has been scheduled to be taken either prior to or concurrently with the professional block classes. Originally students could choose to take either a methods in science or one in social studies. Today, both methods are required in the program. The number of cooperating schools has grown from two to six. The number of cooperating teachers has grown from twenty-five to more than seventy-five, in keeping with enrollment increases.

The Professional Semester for elementary education consists of 12-13 weeks for instruction in classes on the university campus and 4-5 weeks of actual teaching in public schools near the university.

The professional courses which comprise the 12 hour block include:

ELED 315	M-M in Elementary Science	3 hours
ELED 316	M-M in Elementary Math	3 hours
ELED 317	M-M in Language Arts	3 hours
ELED 318	M-M in Elementary Social Studies	3 hours

Each course includes the philosophies and theories (Bruner, Piaget, Gagne, Thorndike, Bloom, Dewey) unique to the content area along with instruction related to materials, techniques, and methods of teaching. The curriculum includes generic components such as methods of teaching, planning and writing daily lessons and units, constructing instructional teaching aids, conducting questioning strategies, and employing techniques of classroom management. A calendar of these specific generic sessions is given to each student at the beginning of each semester. Beginning the Fall semester, 1990, a classroom management component was added to

accompany the generic sessions. This component presents current trends, authorities, and techniques for managing an elementary classroom and responding to inappropriate behavior. During the instructional phase, each student presents lessons in the content areas to fellow students. Five university supervisors, assisted by two graduate assistants, work with the students on-site to provide ideas, models, and techniques for specific instructional situations in each content area.

The practicum phase of the Professional Semester provides prospective teachers an opportunity to gain valuable field experiences under the close supervision of outstanding classroom teachers who are first recommended by their principals and then volunteer to participate. Inservice is held with cooperating teachers to explain the roles of the participants, the classroom teacher, and university supervisors, prior to Block students entering the practicum phase. This aspect of the Professional Semester is conducted in several Ouachita Parish and Monroe City Elementary Schools. Schools are selected to provide students with opportunities to work with multicultural and exceptional populations.

Prior to beginning the practicum phase, students are scheduled to visit the assigned classroom teachers for a total of two days During these days and early in the practicum phase, students observe classroom routines and student characteristics. As the preservice teachers develop skill, competence, and self-confidence, they move from assisting individual students to teaching a small group to teaching the entire class. In addition, each professional semester intern has the responsibility of planning and teaching a minimum of one lesson during the four-hour period he/she is in the school each day. Each professional semester intern

works with individual students who need assistance, prepares materials and media for use in the classroom, and learns how to observe and analyze classroom processes. The aim of this field experience is to expose students to a variety of teaching situations and help them realize the diverse cultures and backgrounds in this geographic area.

Each lesson taught during the practicum phase requires of the prospective teacher detailed planning for lesson objectives, motivation, procedures, selection of learning materials, differentiation for special learners, and lesson evaluation. Self-evaluations, conducted after each class presentation, reveal much thought and insight on the part of the intern. Classroom teachers regularly check plans, offering helpful suggestions and evaluations. University personnel, involved in the program, observe and evaluate the student based on personal characteristics, professional qualities, lesson planning, and teaching techniques. Block students provide feedback to the university instructors about the teaching and learning portion of the Professional Semester by completing evaluation forms at the end of the on-campus work. Fifteen hours of observation credit (in the tutorial, monitoring, and instructional phases) are given for each three hour course taken in the Professional Semester Block.

In order to determine the effectiveness of the program, a questionnaire is used to survey block students at the conclusion of each semester. Since 1985, a survey has been administered to all block students at the conclusion of the semester.

Purpose:

The purpose of this study was to ascertain the effects of accreditation on preservice teachers' attitudes toward their competency gained during the elementary methods courses.

Hypothesis:

The hypothesis of this study was there will be no significant differences between the pre and post accreditation groups in their attitudes toward the elementary preservice methods courses.

Instrumentation

A survey containing 31 questions was administered to the professional block students at the end of each spring and fall semester for the eight consecutive years of 1985-1993 , making a composite of 16 semesters. The questionnaire was based on a 5 point Likert-type scale having the categories: strongly agree, agree, no opinion, disagree, and strongly disagree.

The questionnaires were administered after each student had received his/her grade for each course in the professional block. Responses were completely anonymous, containing only the date of administration.

Since the purpose of this study was to determine whether students felt competent in the four subscales, the "no opinion" category was omitted in the analysis of data because it did not contribute to the overall contrasting attitudes when analyzed for significant differences. The cells of "strongly agree" and "agree" were collapsed into the "agree" category as were the

categories of "strongly disagree" and "disagree" into the category of "disagree."

Using the Chronbach Alpha Coefficient, the reliability of the questionnaire was .90. The population for the study was the 825 students that were enrolled in the Professional Block classes over the past 16 semesters. The questionnaire was divided into four criterion measures: subject matter, audio-visual, classroom management and routines, and communications. The reliability of the four subscales ranged from 66 to 76. The pre-accreditation years consisted of Spring 1985 to Spring 1988 and the post- accreditation being Fall 1988 till Spring 1993.

Analysis of Data:

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Chi Square. The 31 questions were categorized into four criterion measures: subject matter, audio-visual, classroom management and routines, and communications. Each criterion measure contained from 3 to 11 questions. The four criterion measures were used to test for "general" significant differences between the pre and post accreditation effects on the preservice teachers' attitudes toward teacher preparation. Clarification of significant differences were indicated on the subscales of subject matter and classroom management routines.

Table I indicates the overall significant difference ($p \leq .05$) between the pre and post accreditation groups in their overall attitudes toward competency in teaching courses. The overall group agreement was 380 students and the disagreement group consisted of 331 students. For the

TABLE I

PRE AND POST ACCREDITATION OVERALL ATTITUDES OF ELEMENTARY PRESERVICE TEACHERS TOWARD COMPETENCY IN TEACHING

	Pre Accreditation (1985-1988)	Post Accreditation (1988-1993)	Row Total
Agree	132 (62%)	248 (50%)	380
Disagree	82	249 (50%)	331
Column Total	214	497	711

$p \leq .05$

pre-accreditation group, 62% agreed the methods courses were effective and 38% indicated the methods courses in elementary education were ineffective. The post accreditation group revealed that 50% agreed and 50% disagreed the methods courses in elementary education were effective.

Table II indicates significant differences ($p \leq .05$) between the pre and post accreditation attitudes of preservice teachers in the area of subject matter. The agreement group size was 439 students and the disagreement group consisted of 372 students. For the pre accreditation group, 62% felt well prepared in the area of subject matter and 38% disagreed as to being prepared in the area.

The post accreditation data revealed that 51% agreed and 49% disagreed for feeling well prepared in the subject matter areas. The subject matter subscale consisted of questions pertaining to the methods courses (math, science, language arts, social studies), unit construction, and pedagogy.

Table III indicates significant differences ($p \leq .05$) between the pre and post accreditation attitudes of preservice teachers in the area of classroom management and routines. The agreement group had 442 students and the disagreement group consisted of 372 students. For the pre accreditation group, 67% felt well prepared in the area of classroom management and routines and 33% did not feel well prepared in this area. A summary of the post accreditation group indicated that 48% agree and 52% disagree. The subscale for classroom management and routines encompassed classroom management techniques, objective and unit writing, and individualized instruction.

TABLE II

PRE AND POST ACCREDITATION ATTITUDES OF ELEMENTARY PRESERVICE TEACHERS IN THE AREA OF SUBJECT MATTER

	Pre Accreditation (1985-1988)	Post Accreditation (1988-1993)	Row Total
Agree	155 (62%)	284 (51%)	439
Disagree	97 (38%)	275 (49%)	372
Column Total	252	559	811

$p \leq .05$

TABLE III

PRE AND POST ACCREDITATION OVERALL ATTITUDES OF ELEMENTARY PRESERVICE TEACHERS IN THE AREA OF CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT AND ROUTINES

	Pre Accreditation (1985-1988)	Post Accreditation (1988-1993)	Row Total
Agree	170 (67%)	272 (48%)	442
Disagree	84 (33%)	292 (52%)	376
Column Total	254	564	818

$p \leq .05$

Results:

The results of this study are indicated in all three tables. Table I revealed the overall attitudes of preservice teachers toward the effectiveness of the methods courses in elementary education. The pre accreditation showed a more positive attitude than the post-accreditation group. Table II addressed the subscale area of subject matter where preservice teachers of the pre accreditation group felt more prepared than the post accreditation group. Table III indicated that preservice teachers in the pre accreditation group displayed attitudes of being better prepared for the area of classroom management routines than the post-accreditation group.

On specific questions, other than ones pertaining to subject matter and classroom management and routines, significant differences revealed that professional block students did not perceive themselves able to furnish materials for teaching lessons in the classrooms nor in block classes. Also, [illegible] preservice teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the current format of the Professional Block.

Conclusions:

Post accreditation preservice teachers felt the methods courses in elementary education did not prepare them as well when compared to the attitudes of the pre accreditation group. For the two subscales of subject matter and classroom management and routines, pre accreditation students perceived themselves as being better prepared for the clinical experiences in the assigned schools.

Implications:

The implications of this study were:

1. The added component in classroom management might have negated a positive attitude toward being prepared for clinical and field experiences.

2. The additional requirements for the generic section (learning centers and unit writing) could have influenced a negative attitude from post accreditation students.

3. The redesign for writing a comprehensive unit plan could have negatively impacted the attitudes of the students.

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